

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN P. MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1154, A BILL TO EXTEND THE ACADIA NATIONAL PARK ADVISORY COMMISSION, TO PROVIDE IMPROVED VISITOR SERVICES AT THE PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

July 28, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1154, a bill to extend the Acadia National Park Advisory Commission, to provide improved visitor services at the park, and for other purposes. The Department supports enactment of this bill with two technical amendments.

If enacted, S.1154 would accomplish three objectives. First, it would extend the life of the 16-member Acadia National Park Advisory Commission, which is set to expire in September 2006, for an additional 20 years. Second, the bill would increase the park's land acquisition ceiling from \$9.1 million to \$28 million. Third, it would authorize Acadia National Park to participate in the planning, construction, and operation of an intermodal transportation center outside the park's boundaries.

Acadia National Park Advisory Commission

The Acadia National Park Advisory Commission has been in operation for almost 20 years, and continues to be a valuable asset that enhances communication between park managers and local communities. The Commission's state and local representatives

participate actively, and they strongly support its continuation. The cost of administering the Commission is minimal and is covered by the park's operating budget.

Increase in Land Acquisition Ceiling

Acadia National Park's authorized land acquisition ceiling of \$9.1 million has been reached, although there are over 100 tracts left to be acquired to complete the park as authorized by Congress in 1986. Land prices on Mount Desert Island, where Acadia National Park is located, have increased dramatically since 1986 and may continue to do so if local home-inflation trends continue. Many willing landowners are anxious to sell, but the park cannot buy the land because the land acquisition ceiling does not permit the use of sufficient appropriated funds, thus leaving valuable resources within the park threatened with incompatible development.

The current law allowing Congress to exceed the ceiling by 10% or \$1 million per year has resulted in an additional \$8.9 million appropriated over the ceiling, for a total appropriation of \$18 million for land acquisition at Acadia National Park to date. However, because the current law is limited to \$1 million per year, it does not adequately address situations where available tracts are valued higher than \$1 million. If these undeveloped tracts within the boundaries of the park are developed with new structures, acquisition costs will increase. Acquiring these lands sooner rather than later is more cost-effective for the National Park Service in the long run. In addition, the park currently faces encroachment issues, where private landowners use adjacent park lands for swing sets, hot tubs, sheds and the like. The proposed \$28 million ceiling would

allow the National Park Service to acquire all parcels of land that are located within the boundary of the park that are currently available for sale.

Incompatible development within park boundaries can degrade the natural and cultural values that are important to the visitors of Acadia National Park. There are also “spillover” impacts from use of private lands that are surrounded by park land including noise and light impacts, which tend to drive the public away from these parts of the park. Finally, larger blocks of land are more cost-effective to manage than smaller discontinuous parcels that are owned by multiple owners and thus, result in higher boundary monitoring and patrol costs.

Intermodal Transportation Center

The intermodal transportation center is the final piece of a three-phase transportation strategy that was developed with the assistance of an interagency team of transportation and park managers. The interagency team was established pursuant to the 1997 Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary of Transportation and the Secretary of the Interior to comprehensively address public transportation in and around our national parks. Language within S. 1154 authorizing Acadia National Park to participate in the planning, construction and operation of an intermodal transportation center outside park boundaries is essential for completion of a highly successful transportation system that operates through a consortium of twenty partners. These partners include the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Maine Department of Transportation, and many local interests who developed this transportation strategy and

have combined their resources to offer the Island Explorer, a bus system that uses clean propane-powered vehicles to move visitors around the Island. The operational costs are paid for by a special transportation fee imposed at Acadia, state and local funds, and business contributions.

Daily summer use of the Island Explorer has averaged 3,700 riders and more than 1.5 million riders have used the popular system since it began in 1999. Traffic congestion on Mount Desert Island and the negative impacts of too many vehicles in Acadia National Park have been reduced, and the park's air quality has improved annually.

Currently, overnight visitors are picked up at their lodgings by the Island Explorer, but the increasing numbers of day use visitors do not have access to the transit system because it lacks a central parking and bus boarding area. As planned, the project calls for developing an off-island intermodal transportation center to serve day users of Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park. The center is needed to maximize the benefits of the transit system and to fully achieve the project's goals of reducing traffic congestion, preserving park resources and the visitor experience, and ensuring a vibrant tourist economy.

The proposed center would be strategically located on Route 3 (the only road to Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park) in Trenton, Maine. A non-profit partner will acquire the land using donated funds. The Maine Department of Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration will have the lead in the planning and construction of the

center, which will include parking for day users, a visitor orientation facility highlighting park and regional points of interest, a bus boarding area, and a bus maintenance garage.

Most of the proposed facility would be built with funds provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation to the State of Maine. The National Park Service would be responsible for the design, construction, and operation of all or part of the visitor orientation portion of the center, which would include exhibits, media presentations, and general information for park visitors bound for Acadia National Park. The National Park Service might also contribute to maintenance and operation of the facility. The proposed center would replace the park's inadequate Thompson Island Information Center, which is too small to accommodate the large number of summer visitors to the park, contains out-of-date exhibits, and is not optimally located to intercept visitors.

We would recommend two technical amendments be made to section 4 of the bill. First, we need to clarify that the Secretary would be authorized to conduct activities that facilitate the dissemination of information relating to the Island Explorer or any successor to the Island Explorer in case the transit system is renamed. Second, in order to preserve flexibility in how resources are allocated, we would recommend that the word "may" be used instead of "shall".

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.

Technical amendments to S. 1154, the Acadia National Park Improvement Act of 2005

On p. 2, line 9, strike “shall” and insert “may”.

On p. 2, line 26, strike “system;” and insert “system or any successor transit system;”.